

The Builder.

No. CLXXIII.

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For those persons who are now clamouring loudly, against the contemplated injury to the Triumphal Arch at Hyde Park Corner, had spoken out long ago, when we first drew attention to the error about to be committed, it might have been prevented with less difficulty than now. At that time our contemporaries made no response. Every one felt that the intention was preposterous, but no one but ourselves thought it worth while to say so. Now that the scaffolding is up, the blackwork required in the upper part of the archway to carry the proposed pedestal is commenced, and all the arrangements completed, pens are set busily to work, and our arguments in objection are re-produced on all sides.

Coincident with the publication of our last number, containing further strictures on the subject, reports appeared in the daily papers of a conversation in the House of Commons to the same effect.

Lord R. Grosvenor said, the public some time ago found, that a quantity of scaffolding was erected about the arch at the top of Constitution-hill, and they were informed that it was intended for the elevation of an enormous equestrian statue of the illustrious duke, which was very much too large for the place on which it was about to be placed. Very great objections to this had been made, and on inquiry he had been told that the arch was found to be not strong enough to bear the statue, and that an outlay would be necessary to render it so. That being the case, he and the public had been delighted to hear that the plan of placing the statue on the arch had been put a stop to. Since then, however, it had again been resolved, he believed, to place the statue there. His question, and what the public wished to know, was, whether that part of the town was to be defaced by placing this statue in that situation?

Sir R. Peel said, some time ago subscriptions had been proposed to be made for erecting an equestrian statue to the noble duke, and a committee had been appointed by the subscribers to direct the application of the fund. But before the subscriptions were raised, a communication had been made to his late Majesty King William IV., who had been requested to state whether, in the event of the proposed subscriptions being raised for a magnificent equestrian statue to the Duke of Wellington, his Majesty would give his consent to its being placed on the arch at the top of Constitution-hill. Subsequently, a similar request had been made to her present Majesty, and he believed that Lord Melbourne, who was then Prime Minister, had been authorized to communicate to the committee, that her Majesty would confirm the intention of her Royal predecessor. Therefore the subscriptions had been raised after two successive sovereigns had declared, that they had no objection to the proposed site of the statue. He would not give any opinion on the question. The noble Lord was of opinion that the statue, if placed as proposed, would disfigure the neighbourhood. The subscribers, on the contrary, thought it would be a very great ornament to the neighbourhood. (A laugh.)

In fact, they ought to have withheld their subscriptions if they disapproved the site on which it was proposed to place the statue. He had felt disposed to think that a better site might be chosen. However, there was great difference of opinion as to the best mode of placing the statue. Then the architect's opinion as to the strength of the arch was to be considered, and on the matter being brought before him (Sir R. Peel), he had proposed, on the part of the Crown, to give almost any other site that might be agreed upon. The statue might be placed either between the Athenæum and the United Service Clubhouses, or in the immediate neighbourhood of the Duke of Wellington's residence, or near the Horse Guards. He had also undertaken, on the part of the Government, to propose to Parliament to vote a sum for the erection of a suitable pedestal (echeers), and that, on the whole, he had thought would have been the more satisfactory mode of settling the matter; but the committee, having again considered the subject, thought, that the consent of her Majesty having been formally signified to them, and considering that many of the subscribers had subscribed with the idea that the site originally fixed upon would not be departed from, it was doubtful whether they had the right to make any alteration in the site, and therefore it was determined by the committee that the site should not be altered.

Mr. Baillie observed, that it was generally reported that the statue was too large for the arch, and that it was consequently to be placed lengthways to the arch (a laugh), so as to look east and west, or at right angles to the road; and what he wished to suggest was, that at all events the statue should be placed properly on the arch.

Sir R. Peel thought, that though there might be better taste, there was something insidious in the suggestion; for if the statue were placed as the hon. member suggested, it might not be very convenient for those who passed under. (A laugh). The statue must be placed longitudinally with respect to the arch, if it were placed there at all.

Not a single member was there who would open his lips in defence of the proposed site, although Sir Frederick Trench was present, on whom the responsibility seems to rest: all agreed that the premier's offer of another site and a fitting pedestal should be accepted, and yet, in the face of this unanimous objection, an enormity is to be perpetuated which will long remain a disgrace to the metropolis, and the laughing-stock of foreigners.

Since then Sir Frederick Trench has published a letter in the *Times*, to correct certain inaccuracies in the speech of Lord Robert Grosvenor, but quite fails to touch the main point. "As to the objections to the position," says Sir Frederick, "they must have been very limited, or they would have reached the committee before the year 1845. And as to the question of taste, many of the most competent judges maintain that the position is most suitable; and that the effect will be supremely magnificent, when the outline of this beautiful colossal statue stands in bold relief, backed by an azure or a glowing sky, and I verily believe that they are at least as numerous and as competent to form a correct judgment in matters of taste, as those who are so strongly opposed to placing the statue in this position."

As for myself, with the utmost sincerity I disclaim any pretensions to be ranked in the former class, though I admire and acquiesce in their opinion.

I remember making an application to Sir Herbert Taylor, to ascertain whether his late

Majesty entertained the objection which had been suggested to the committee. "That there was no precedent for an equestrian statue of a subject in such a position;" and Sir Herbert Taylor's answer was, "that his Majesty had no objection to the position, and that if a precedent was necessary he was ready to make one."

A very easy way of getting out of the difficulty. Propriety and fitness however, depend on something more than kingly will. *Le Roi le veut*, will not turn ugliness into beauty; or prevent the sneers of posterity.

Even the *Literary Gazette* who has from the commencement, watched over and kindly petted the project, and who blew the first trumpet to announce the completion of the statue, feels compelled now to admit, that "though the arch may probably be the most distinguished position in London (too fixed, we fear, to be changed), we have always been of opinion that a pedestal peculiar to itself, in a very public and commanding site, would be preferable."

We have received several letters on the subject, but have room only for one, the shortest:—

MR. EDITOR,—A few weeks since you indulged your lively vein in your leading article, giving the public to understand you could enjoy a joke as well as the rest of the world. Now I cannot see why you should wish to deprive that respectable class, the omnibus cads, of a joke, which they will assuredly make amongst one another, if the Wellington statue should attain its at present intended site. Depend upon it, the cad Jem will say to the cad Bob, as they chivy up Piccadilly, "I say, Bob, which duke do you mean? the iron duke, or the brass duke?"—seeing that one will be a fixture on one side the road, whilst the residence of the other is just opposite. I quite agree with you, that it is in bad taste, and very ridiculous, to place the statue on the top of the arch, but for all that, it is a pity the cad's joke should be prevented: it is of much less consequence (as the committee think) that the arch should be spoilt.—I am, Sir, &c.,

AN OLD SUBSCRIBER.

The proposition has not a single redeeming point; public opinion is unanimously against it; and we do hope, that either through Government interference, or the good sense of some members of the testimonial committee, the contemplated destructive act may be prevented even at this late moment.

Lord Francis Egerton, as a subscriber, has protested in the strongest terms against the proposition. Why does not his lordship call a meeting of the subscribers?

AWARDS OF OFFICIAL REFEREES.

HOSPITALS—FIRE-PROOF FLOORS.

WITH regard to a building about to be added to University College Hospital in Upper Gower-street, in the district of St. Pancras. Mr. Ainger submitted a requisition, setting forth—"it is provided by the Metropolitan Buildings Act, in Schedule C, Part I, that 'hospitals' are to be deemed to belong to the third, or public building class, and further, in Part 6, with regard to buildings of the third class, that 'the floors of the halls, passages, stairs, and landings, and all other ways of ingress and egress to and from all apartments used for public congregation, must be wholly constructed fire-proof.'

Add whereas it is hereby declared, that there is not intended to be any apartment of the said building to be used for public congregation.

And whereas a doubt has arisen whether under such circumstances the rule for fire-proof floors and stair-cases applies to the building in question.

Now I, the said Alfred Ainger, being of opinion that, inasmuch as the said building is not to be used in any part thereof for public congregation, or for the assembly of persons in large numbers for any purpose, a compli-